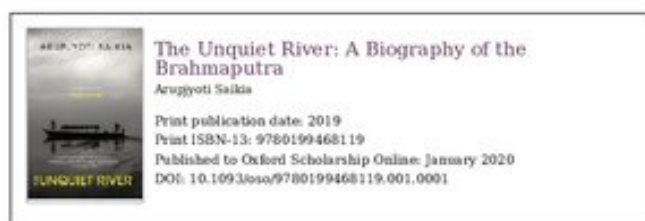


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Endorsement



(p.i) Endorsement

Arupjyoti Saikia

Arupjyoti Saikia is already known to be the leading historian of Assam. With this magnificent biography of the Brahmaputra, he has also established himself as India's pre-eminent environmental historian. This book beautifully and seamlessly transcends conventional binaries of hill and plain, land and water, economy and culture, social science and natural science. Using a dazzling array of primary sources, Saikia constructs a compelling narrative of the river's journey from geological time to the present, evoking the Brahmaputra's many moods, the forms of human livelihood it enables and constrains, the forms of non-human life it sustains and enhances. This is a total history in the best, and fullest, sense of the term.

—Ramachandra Guha (Historian and Biographer)

This is a masterpiece of environmental history. Arupjyoti Saikia weaves together multiple scales of time—from geological history to sudden disasters—in bringing the Brahmaputra's history to life. Exhaustively researched and beautifully written, the greatest achievement of this book is to tell the stories of those who live by, and depend on, this great river. One of our finest historians, Saikia forges a new path in writing the biography of a river and its people. In doing so, he illuminates some of the greatest environmental and political challenges of our time.

—Sunil Amrith (Professor of History, Department of South Asian Studies, Harvard University, USA)

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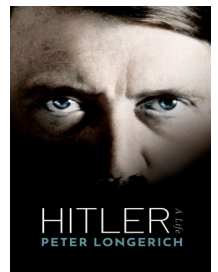
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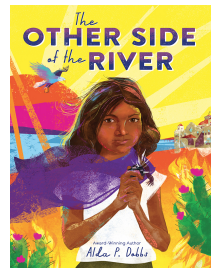
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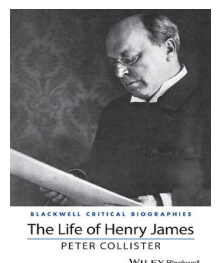
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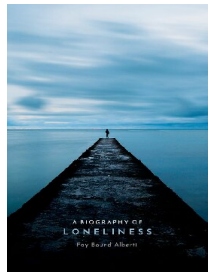
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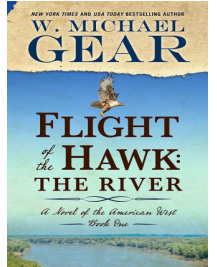
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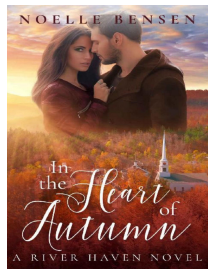
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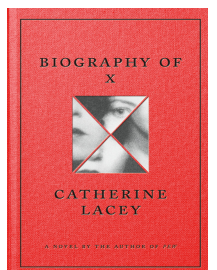
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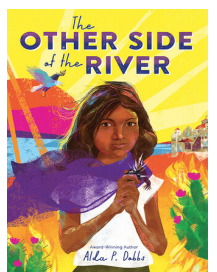
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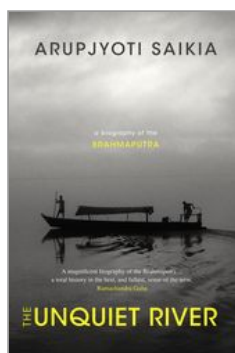
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—Sunil Amrith (Professor of History, Department of South Asian Studies, Harvard University, USA)

Arupjyoti Saikia's history of the Brahmaputra springs from two big ideas. The first requires treating natural and human history of the river in a coeval fashion. The second insists on a visualization of riverine environmental history as inseparable from the environmental histories of mountains and plains that are the source regions and companion terrain of the river. Saikia discovers the many registers, including literature and poetry, hydrology and agrarian history, in which life in and around the Brahmaputra is imagined, experienced, transformed, and ultimately narrated. A peerless contribution to scholarship, this book will inform and enthral all readers.

—K. Sivaramakrishnan (Dinakar Singh Professor of Anthropology and Professor of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Yale University, USA)

With rich stories and gripping narratives, the author invites you to 'take a boat to the middle of the river', 'swim across certain depths', and 'get [y]our feet wet in the shallows'. What a remarkable journey across space and time, allowing you to witness the intimate relationships and co-evolution among the river, **(p.ii)** the floodplains, the highlands, and many lives struggling and thriving with them! Read the book; take the journey.

—Ling Zhang (Associate Professor of History, Boston College, USA)

Lucky Brahmaputra, lucky Assam! If a river could get to choose for its biographer the most learned, comprehensive, scrupulous, and yet sensitive scholar available, the Brahmaputra could not possibly have done better. Saikia's superb study is a model of interdisciplinary learning, hydrological knowledge, and historical depth. The Yangzi and Indus must be green with envy.

—James C. Scott (Sterling Professor of Political Science and Anthropology, Yale University, USA)

What kind of history can be told of a region by a river which is its lifeblood and lifeline? Crashing down from the Himalayas, moody and impervious to human efforts to engineer and tame it, the Brahmaputra has sustained the ecology of life and society of Assam, on its terms so far. Saikia's opus is magisterial, but not without passion, as he describes the human-river interactions from its geological bases to contemporary hydrological conceits.

—Prasenjit Duara (Oscar Tang Professor, Duke University, USA)

No longer is *The Unquiet River* a mere abstract flowing on the margins of time. Using a historian's craft, Saikia reveals the Brahmaputra as a vibrant

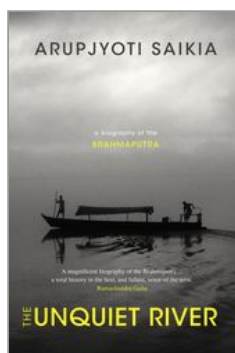
force of mud, silt, and fury that has played a part in the making of social worlds and the shaping of political possibilities.

—Rohan D' Souza (Associate Professor, Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University, Japan)

An environmental history of the Brahmaputra has long been overdue. Much like the Indus, Mekong, Yangtze, Kaveri, and Ganga, this is a river whose story is laden with not one but many keenly contested meanings, nowhere more so than in Assam. The state's foremost environmental historian traces the story of more than just the river. This book contains a forest of narratives of change through time; floods and jute fields, tea gardens and dykes, grasslands and flood plains all come alive with a cast of human characters whose dreams and nightmares, hopes and fears do so much to shape the great river. Saikia also warns of the limits to human engineering of a great river with a majesty that still stirs poets, writers, and lay persons alive.

—Mahesh Rangarajan (Professor of History and Environmental Studies, Ashoka University, India)

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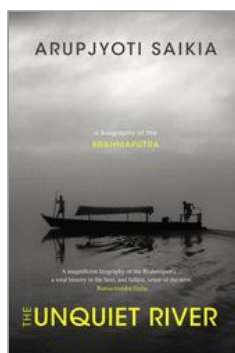
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(p.ix) Acknowledgements

Arupjyoti Saikia

LIKE MARK TWAIN'S MISSISSIPPI, THE Brahmaputra seems to be an open book, always ready to tell its own story. But it runs deep and wide and encompasses many complexities. Writing a book about such a multifaceted river would not have been possible without the help of many friends. I have relied on the research of numerous scholars and scientists who have spent their lifetimes studying the river and the life around it. I have learned from their conversations, and have liberally used their ideas and findings. At different times and places, I have received generous advice from Katherine Morrison, Kuntala Lahiri Dutta, Mahesh Rangarajan, James C. Scott, Rohan D'Souza, Ramachandra Guha, Gunnel Cederlöf, Nayanjot Lahiri, Upinder Singh, Robert James Wasson, Tanika Sarkar, Neeladri Bhattacharya, Sugata Bose, K. Sivaramakrishnan, Dipesh Chakravarty, Iftekhar Iqbal, Indrani Chatterji, David Gilmartin, Sumit Guha, Sunil Amrith, Pradip Krishen, Mukul Sharma, Shekhar Pathak, Annu Jalais, Amita Baviskar, Nandini Sundar, Maan Barua, Himanshu Thakkar, Ghazala Shahabuddin, Raman Sukumar, Prasenjit Duara, William Van Schendel, Mandy Sadan, Dan Smyer Yu, Malini Sur, Raziuddin Aquil, Berenice Guyot-Rechard, Shruti Kapila, Sanal Mohan, Bhaskar Vira, Chris Courtney, Anindya Sinha, Debjani Bhattacharyya, Rana Pratap Behl, Gautam Bhadra, Daniel Bander, and Jayeeta Sharma. All have **(p.x)** contributed to the making of this book in some way or the other. Kaushik Dasgupta volunteered to read some of the early drafts. I am especially thankful to Mahesh Rangarajan, Robert James Wasson, Gunnel Cederlöf, Rohan D'Souza, and the late Basudev Chatterji for reading parts of this book. Despite their busy schedules, they generously and carefully commented on sections of the manuscripts. Mahesh Rangarajan read an early draft of the complete manuscript and provided thoughtful insights and comments.

The book would not have been possible without a generous postdoctoral fellowship at the Program in Agrarian Studies at Yale University, USA. There I attended seminar courses taught by James C. Scott and K. Sivaramakrishnan. Both Jim and Sivi have been instrumental in shaping this book. The seminars convinced me that behind the aesthetics of the Brahmaputra that charm us, there lies a complex story of humans and nature that requires serious attention. The fellowship essentially compelled me to rethink this book. Peter Perdue at Yale, vastly knowledgeable about the Chinese rivers, was kind enough to listen to my accounts of the Brahmaputra. Wonderful colleagues provided much-needed intellectual companionship: Ling Zhang, Dario Gaggio, Roseann Cohen, Brooke Crockett, Kasturi Gupta, Sahana Ghosh, Aniket Aga, Chitrangada Choudhury, Juned Sheikh, Madhabi Murthy, Lousia Cortesi, Sara Shneiderman, Rochisha Narayan, and Aniket Dey at Yale; Arnab Dey at Chicago; Aniket Dey at Harvard; Aparna Sarma and Monica Smith at University of California Los Angeles (UCLA).

A book of this nature would have been stillborn without access to the marvellous collections at the British Library; the School of Oriental and African Studies (London); The London Metropolitan Archives and the Bodleian Library, Oxford University; Cambridge University Library; the Lakshminath Bezbaruah Library, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati (IIT-G); Jawaharlal Nehru University, libraries of the Yale and Chicago Universities; the UCLA Library; National Archives of India (New Delhi); Assam State Archives (Dispur); S.K. Bhuyan Library, Cotton University (Guwahati); the K.K. Handique Library, Gauhati University; and documents available at digital sites of many libraries including National Digital Library of India and National Archives of India. Staff at the Assam State Archives were extremely supportive. Jishnu Barua and his brilliant team of archivists **(p.xi)** have transformed the Assam State Archives in the last few years. Research in the Assam State Archives is a pleasure now and I am sure that more scholars will come to work in these archives. Prabir Mukhopadhyay of the library of the University of Calcutta was always generous with his time in locating archival sources.

Doubts about the Brahmaputra and ecological niceties of Assam were often sorted out with generous advice from Abani Bhagawati, Arup Kumar Dutta, Dulal C. Goswami, Chandan Mahanta, Chandan Sarma, Arup Kumar Sarma, Neeraj Vagholikar, Jahnabi Gogoi Nath, Akhil Gogoi, Prasun Barman, Jiban Narah, Kalyan Das, Navarun Varma, Gitashree Tamuli, Narayan Sarma, Apurba Kumar Das, Manjil Hazarika, Sarat Phukan, Lakhi Prasad Hazarika, Sidhartha Lahiri, Subasisha Dutta, and Chandan Kumar Sarma. I am grateful to all of them. Anupam Barua helped me in rectifying several factual inaccuracies. I owe special thanks to Ranjit Kumar Dev Goswami and Pradip Khatoniar for spending with me endless hours in conversation and answering my queries on the complexities of Assam and her history with patience, humour, and eloquence. I had the wonderful opportunity to work with my graduate students at IIT-G:

Prarthana Saikia, Namrata Borkataky, Rakesh Soud, Biswajit Sarma, Himalaya Bora, Swagata Mukhopadhyaya, and Kawaldeep Kour. Special mention must be made of graduate students at Jawaharlal Nehru University: Bedabrata Gogoi and Bikram Bora; they deserve special thanks for their great help. Upasana Devi and Paloma Bhattacharjee brilliantly surfed through many archival and other textual materials for me. Several research interns, who meticulously went through my archival notes, made writing for this work easier.

My workplace, the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences in IIT-G, is surrounded by the sounds of the Brahmaputra. There could be no better place than this institution to think about and be inspired to write about the Brahmaputra. Colleagues have been supportive intellectually as well as otherwise. For their warmth and friendship, I would like to thank colleagues at IIT-G: John Thomas, Vipul Dutta, Debarshi Das, Priyankoo Sarmah, Sukanya Sarma, Mrinal Kanti Dutta, Saundarjya Borbora, Rohini Mokashi-Punker, Ritwik Ranjan, and Ranu Roychoudhuri deserve special mention. Banti Bhuyan and Pradip K. Bhuyan of S.K. Bhuyan Endowment Trust have generously donated an endowment chair at IIT-G. The major research for this **(p.xii)** work was made possible with the help of this grant. A grant from the Action Aid Association has helped to procure maps and other works for this book.

Abhishek Srivastava and Bishnu Tamuli from the Design Department at IIT-G helped prepare and redraw maps and images of the modern Brahmaputra and the surrounding floodplain landscape. I thank Arati Kumar-Rao and Rituraj Konwar for the photographs used in the book.

Two anonymous reviewers of the Oxford University Press (OUP) offered careful insights into the manuscript. I owe a large debt to Rimli Borooah, a marvellous editor, who generously brought her editorial eye to give a new lease of life to my fuzzy ideas. Reading with great care and intelligence, some parts more than twice, she made better every page she handled. Editors at OUP have been extremely supportive and encouraging throughout the process. The editorial team at OUP paid meticulous attention to ensure that the manuscript makes a safe landing. I am deeply grateful to them for their sustained interest in this work.

Ideas which are part of this book were presented in various conferences, talks, and television programmes, including Yale Agrarian Studies Colloquium; Yale South Asia Colloquium; American Environmental History Conference; Duke River History Conference; Association of Asian Studies Conference at Kyoto; Disaster History Conference at National University of Singapore; Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi; Dibrugarh University; Cotton University; and National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bengaluru. I am indeed fortunate to have received insightful comments from those who listened to me—insights which have eventually become part of the book. Thoroughly revised

portions from A. Saikia, 2015, 'Jute in the Brahmaputra Valley: The Making of Flood Control in Twentieth-century Assam', *Modern Asian Studies* 49 (5): 1405–41 have been used in chapters 1, 9, and 11, and from A. Saikia, 2013, 'Ecology, Floods and the Political Economy of Hydropower: The River Brahmaputra in the 20th Century', paper published by Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, in chapters 1 and 12 of this book.

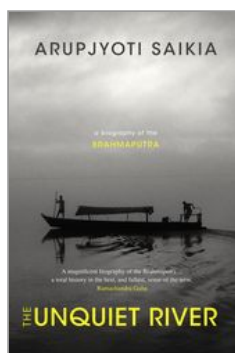
I have chosen to write about the river's journey through Assam. I am fortunate to have been born and brought up not far from the river and its floodplains. This is where I live and it is the history and culture **(p.xiii)** I am most familiar with. It is a region where the river is seen as central to culture, identity, and politics. This book contains many of the ideas I have gained by virtue of being born and presently living on the river's bank.

I also owe a substantial debt of gratitude to the people, including my childhood friends, who live in and around the Brahmaputra—my efforts at putting this book together pales in comparison to their daily experiences with the river. My ideas of floods and agriculture come from their and my own experiences of learning to live with those volatile landscapes.

My family has been extremely supportive. I have missed many an event when I should have been with them, so much so that my presence is hardly required for family occasions any more. Banani, despite her own demanding teaching responsibilities, has shouldered most of the responsibilities that I escaped from. She has helped me to become familiar with many facets of the Assamese literary world. Nizan is now my honorary editorial adviser who equally enjoys reading about the Brahmaputra. They shared every moment that has emerged during the writing of this book. Without their love and support, this book would have been impossible.

Gautam Bhadra, an inspiring teacher, an outstanding historian, and a fine human being, insisted that I write this book. This book is dedicated to Gautamda. Finally, I owe a lot to Mewnu for claiming my reading desk as his dais and my keyboard as his ramp. **(p.xiv)**

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(p.xv) Note on Geography, Spelling, Illustrations, and Referencing Style

Arupjyoti Saikia

THOUGH THE BRAHMAPUTRA MAKES A wonderful journey across nations (China, India, and Bangladesh), in this book the river is discussed essentially in reference to its life and times in the Indian state of Assam only. Place names, such as Gauhati, Durrung, and Nowgong, which were transliterated differently earlier have been used in their current forms. Similar rules apply to surnames such as Phookun and so on. Exceptions are made for historically well-known spellings for places and names of tribes, including institutions such as Gauhati University. The river's name was also spelled variously until the mid-nineteenth century. If not part of a quote, the book has used the standard spelling 'Brahmaputra'.

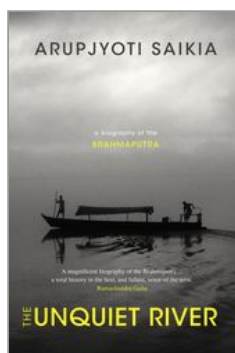
The book follows two different sets of referencing. For the standard printed books, one can refer to the bibliography for full references. The archival materials are cited in complete detail in the notes itself, along with the newspaper and journal references.

Maps produced here are for illustration and not to scale. They are redesigned based on original sources, which are mentioned individually as well. Figures, unless specifically mentioned otherwise, also follow similar rules. **(p.xvi)**

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Arupjyoti Saikia

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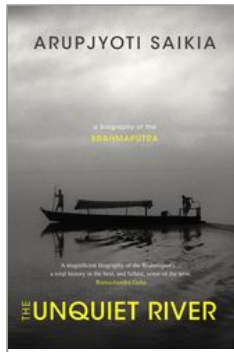
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(p.xx) (p.xxi) Introduction

Arupjyoti Saikia

THE BRAHMAPUTRA IS AN OFFSPRING of a natural past rather than of human history. Geological contingency rather than human labour has shaped much of its history. Until recently, humans did not, indeed could not, fundamentally change the river. While embankments have imposed certain constraints, the river has miraculously escaped the domination of the age of technology. Unlike many great rivers of the world—the Indus, the Yellow River, the Mekong, the Nile, the Yangtze, the Rhine—the Brahmaputra still remains largely untamed, little touched by the powers of dredgers, dynamite, near mystical mathematical formulas, dams, and locks.¹ There are no storage dams on the Brahmaputra to produce electricity, nor has it been subjected to major hydro-engineering projects. Stray ideas of straitjacketing the river's braided beds into a single channel were never translated into reality. There has been no large-scale dredging of the river to excavate the river's rising bed. While there are dykes everywhere, the gushing floodwaters of the river break these structures regularly. Even now, only parts of the river's long course are witness to concrete houses, roads, and markets. Its banks are still covered with grass, trees, and temporary houses. The Brahmaputra is thus still deeply embedded in the idea of wilderness and essentially remains a rural river. In contemporary popular narrative, the river and its environs are seen as one of the last bastions of **(p.xxii)** nature. But this is only partly true: an environmental history of the Brahmaputra would uncover a different story. It will be a never-ending narrative of indiscernible environmental transformations of the river, the surrounding landscape, and life therein.

For many, the river is a geological wonder. Its Himalayan journey through much of Tibet and then through India and Bangladesh is an ever-evolving narrative of geological adventures.² The river's physical condition is deeply influenced by the Himalayas and its environment. Although it is not one of the longest rivers of the world, it still drains more than 700,000 square km of area.³ However, the Mekong and the Nile travel a much longer distance.⁴ During the monsoon, the

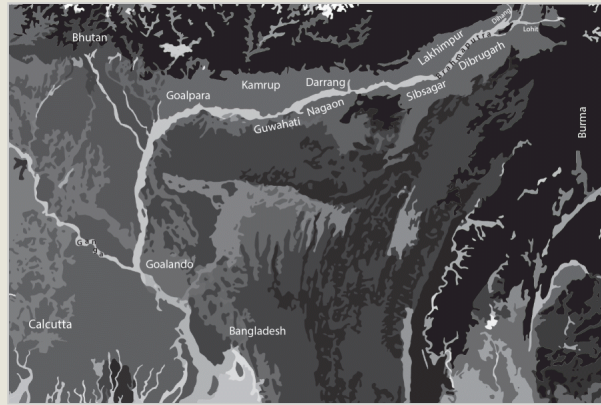


Figure I.1 An artist's impression of the Brahmaputra through the floodplains of India and Bangladesh

Source: Abhishek Shrivastava.

Brahmaputra's swelling waters turn violent and unpredictable; its waters spread as far as the eye can see. The Ganga and the Brahmaputra together discharge the highest volume of water of the world's rivers; the Brahmaputra supplies water at the rate of approximately 19,800 cubic metres per second to the Bay of Bengal.⁵ In comparison, the Indus supplies only one-third of this to the Arabian Sea.⁶ The Brahmaputra, however, can be lethargic in the dry winter months. Only 16 rivers on earth carry more than 100 million tons of sediment to the sea and the Brahmaputra ranks as one of the highest amongst them.⁷

The river, however, does not derive its greatness from these figures alone. These figures only illustrate the river's dynamics. The river occupies a central role in a complex ecosystem. It is also deeply intertwined with the life and times of human and non-human. In the twenty-first century, the Brahmaputra and its floodplains are home to millions of humans and non-humans. Human relationship with the river has evolved over millennia. Since earliest times in human history, the river has provided a geographical passage for the exchange of goods produced in the floodplains, hills, and remote areas surrounding the Brahmaputra. However, it has also caused great devastation through annual floods. So, while humans have adapted to the ebb and flow of the river, they have also attempted to control it, with limited success. The people who made the floodplains their home tried to adjust the rhythm of their life to the tune of the river. For centuries, farmers, fishers, graziers, traders, and soldiers learned the art of adaption to the ebb and flow of the river. These human adaptations to the river were possible as they largely recognized that land and water were inseparable. The river and its floodplains are **(p.xxiii)** home to many species of fauna as well, many of which are relict. Of these, the greater one-horned rhinoceros, elephants, and tigers, as able swimmers, have been able to

withstand strong floods and escape to higher land. Varieties of fish, birds, snakes, and tortoises, as well as the Gangetic dolphin have made the river their home. Till the early twentieth century, it was also home to crocodiles, including the gharial, an ancient Triassic creature.

Until the mid-twentieth century, the Brahmaputra was at the centre of Assam's material and political well-being. It was vital to the rulers of the land—the Ahoms (thirteenth to eighteenth century CE), the Koch (sixteenth century CE), the Bhuyans (thirteenth to sixteenth century CE), and the British colonialists (1826–1947)—militarily and commercially. The Ahom kings manipulated the river somewhat, by constructing dykes or embankments which served them well; the British continued the practice. An elaborate hierarchy of Ahom bureaucracy made good use of the river. Their military power, especially, was dependent on the Brahmaputra. Their boatmen spent countless nights gauging the depth of the river and its current. Royal messengers brought messages for the kings and their officials on boats. Innumerable river checkpoints helped levy tolls on traders on the rivers. In the seventeenth century, the Mughal and Ahom army regularly fought on the Brahmaputra. The power and skill of the Mughals' celebrated cavalry could not make up for their lack of knowledge of the Brahmaputra and its floodplain. The battle of Saraighat (1671 CE)—Assam's most notable battle—and many others were fought on the river. The Ahom army used their excellent knowledge of the river and its floodplain to chase off the Mughal army. The Ahom kings would use the river to escape secretly after losing battles to the Mughals. But the Mughal conquest was only temporary. Despite their best efforts, the Mughals could not adapt to the dynamics of the river, plains, or hills and, they ultimately had to give up the idea of conquering Assam.

In the late eighteenth century, the British Empire struggled to withstand the odds that had tormented the Mughals. However, early into their control of Assam, the British officials understood that it was a unique region whose polity and economy were highly conditioned by the continuously shifting courses of the river and its tributaries. In Bengal's northeast, the Gangetic plain 'model' could not be replicated. The first ever treaty signed between the **(p.xxiv)** British East India Company and the reigning Ahom king in 1793 specially granted permission to the company to appoint agents on the Brahmaputra at Candahar Chokey and Guwahati.⁸ Decades later, the first Anglo-Burmese war (1824–6) underlined the importance of the Brahmaputra once again.⁹

The British colonial government's understanding of the fluid geographical boundaries, and the role of climate and ecology in people's livelihoods and sustenance, enabled it to gain a foothold in this region. The empire thrived in Assam by virtue of the colonialists' ability to capitalize on Assam's natural bounty. Their reckless exploitation of natural resources severely affected the landscape and reduced nature's ability to replenish itself. While the imperial forestry programme since the late decades of the nineteenth century changed

the region's ecology on a large scale, mining disrupted the subterranean soil pattern within a short period of time. In its commercial undertakings in the region, the empire made the river, and the great energy lying within, its ally. The Brahmaputra was at the forefront of how the British understood Assam. The river posed a massive challenge in navigation because of 'the strength of the current and prevalent easterly winds'.¹⁰ Steamers solved that problem to some extent, and the river was established as the highway for the Empire's route to and from Assam. A Christian missionary announced to his brethren in Europe: 'The Brahmaputra is the only road.'¹¹

The river helped to transform the valley into the Empire's great hinterland. It vastly expanded the mobility of the new administrators and goods produced on land. The Brahmaputra was especially useful in the flourishing of the tea industry of Assam. The introduction of the cultivation of jute, the golden fibre, in the river's floodplains was a very significant development in the colonial period. The cultivation of jute transformed the floodplains, as more embankments came up across the river and its tributaries to protect this precious crop from floodwaters. After India's Independence, the river's banks came to be literally swamped with embankments by the 1960s. The monsoon crop was saved from the rising waters for some years but it was a temporary relief. Embankments were breached and even their quick repair failed to provide effective reprieve. And by the turn of the twentieth century, grand plans were in place to build dams on the river and its tributaries. In 2017, India's national planners proposed a **(p.xxv)** dam on the upstream of the Brahmaputra to produce 10,000 MW of electricity. The Chinese political and technological elites have lined up much more ambitious plans to remake the river's upstream through dams and diversion of its course.

Across the globe, the fate and fortune of many rivers has been remade by rulers and engineers.¹² Engineers have imposed fundamental changes on the rivers, straightening their channels and regulating their flows, for instance, in the Rhine, where flood control and channelization changed the river's flow regime and sediment load pattern, exposing the river to uncertainties.¹³ Some rivers' links with the floodplains were severed, with adverse ecological consequences.¹⁴ Industrial pollutants flowing through these rivers disfigured their ecology.¹⁵ We know how the engineering and administrative decisions about the European rivers of the nineteenth century led to rapid industrialization, and hence profoundly degraded the rivers' environments.¹⁶ Canals on the Ganga helped spread deadly malaria in the nineteenth century. Experiments on the Nile led to disaster as canals enabled the spread of schistosomiasis. But nature is multihued, complex, and not always amenable to linear interventions. The rivers in Southeast Asia are no exception. The best example is that of the Mekong Delta, where the river's dynamics first defied the French and then US engineers.¹⁷ In recent times more holistic ideas of waters, lands, and rivers have emerged to challenge dominant views of river training and control.¹⁸ By the end

of the twentieth century, efforts were on across the globe, for instance in the Rhine, to restore the lost natural habitats. There have been limited successes but it is a beginning.¹⁹

Will the Brahmaputra—so far subjected only to moderate human imprints—and its floodplains survive the grand plans being laid down for their control? What is the price paid for benefits extracted by regulation of the river? Have there been any unforeseen effects when communities and the state tried to manage the river? How do such efforts impact the river's relationship with communities and political power? This book examines these questions, and others, by way of a long-term environmental history of the Brahmaputra and its floodplains. We could attempt three distinct kinds of histories of the Brahmaputra without assigning any hierarchy to them. It could be a natural history of the river itself, a history of human actions on it, or a history of the river-human interactions. This book is a combination of all three, **(p.xxvi)** connected to each other intimately. This work sets out to recount how the river and its environs became the setting for a story involving both success and failure for human and non-human. To comprehend the river and appreciate the relations between the river and human life, we need to consider three kinds of natural forces related to the river—the river itself, the hills, and the floodplains. An environmental history of the Brahmaputra is truly a connected history of highlands, floodplains, and the river. The changing relationship between the river and the human lives lies at the heart of this book. People related to the river in different, varying, even conflicting ways, and their contests over meaning and control of the Brahmaputra are central to my narrative.

In our times, rivers are more politically and economically contested than ever before. The role of rivers in shaping the life of a region and its inhabitants is now more recognized. Rivers mould riverine communities. While acknowledging this, I will argue that the longer geo-history, hydrology, and ecological dynamics are far more critical to the Brahmaputra's story. Such an approach can caution against the idea that modern technology can 'tame', 'contain', and 'domesticate' rivers.

Scholars have visualized rivers such as the Mississippi, Yellow, Volga, Columbia, Rhine, Nile, Yangtze, and Mekong in their own ways.²⁰ Each and every river bears deep a human imprint. The interplay of the roles of the state, river engineers, and rivers has been a key issue of discussion in these works.²¹ There are works on how the need for energy and the careful use of human and mechanized labour have brought humans and rivers together.²² A masterly example is that of Blackbourn, who, in his works on the Rhine, argues he is not writing a history of the river as such, but one of human ideas, practices, contests, and visions of what to make of the river.²³

How does India fare in this regard? A small body of works within the vibrant field of India's environmental history talks about the history of India's rivers and their ethnography.²⁴ These works mostly focus on canals, dams and irrigation, water conflicts and displacement, making of cities, or on the highly engineered landscapes.²⁵ There are books on river engineers and dams but, surprisingly, rarely on the biological life of a river.²⁶ Nor do they pay much heed to longer geological pasts. **(p.xxvii)** Rivers have shaped our pasts. They are central to the political, economic, and social histories of communities and nation-states.²⁷ Previous scholars have always talked about the birth of civilization along the great rivers.²⁸

The Brahmaputra has not been given a central role in the histories of South Asia. Unlike many other rivers of the world, it has not been the subject of political and historical narratives. Have historians been unfair to the Brahmaputra? As astounding as this may sound, it might actually be true. It is part of the marginality of the North East but much more than just that. This overwhelming, powerful, and majestic river still remains an outlier to the country's many and varied historical imaginings. To immediately assuage ourselves, we could perhaps claim that the mighty Brahmaputra—the fluvial spine that connects the mountains, hills, valleys, and floodplains—is too imperious a force to be discussed in modern history writing. Conversely, we could claim that this powerful river's triumph over us is so complete that it comes alive only as part of myth and folklore, and in the stories of the common people, poetry, and song rather than in the dry narrative of archival fact and the dull prose of cause and effect. Alternatively, we could argue that historians have remained too firmly on land and behind the embankments and, therefore, cannot think like amphibians.

While historians have thus far missed a clear view of the Brahmaputra, we might still recover a new sight by reorienting our gaze. It is time to take a boat to the middle of the river to observe the land and, wherever the currents are not that strong, perhaps swim across certain depths or even get our feet wet in the shallows to reframe Assam's history with the river at the centre.

We have to begin by recounting the many histories of Assam that have failed to mingle their narratives with these great waters that surround it and make ideas about Assam possible. There can be no other better illustration than the *Assam Buranji* of Haliram Dhekial Phukan (1802–1832). Phukan, an employee of the British East India Company who earlier worked with the Ahom king, published his *Buranji* in 1829. This formidable account of Assam, a historical introduction to the Brahmaputra Valley, which, in 1826, had become part of East India Company territory, acknowledged the river's presence only in a single sentence.²⁹ His predecessors, the Ahom chroniclers, were no different.³⁰ Known for their awareness of their surroundings **(p.xxviii)** and diligent ways of storytelling, they too snubbed the river. This was despite the fact that their

masters, the Ahom kings, understood that their rule over Assam and its people solely depended on knowing the river.³¹

The fifteenth-century saint-scholar Sankardev (d. 1568 CE) spent a major part of his life travelling on the river. The saint's biographies vividly describe how he spent months on the Brahmaputra as a pilgrim and a preacher, trying to escape the wrath of the Ahom kings. His followers believed that he had extraordinary powers that enabled him to swim across the river even when it was in full spate. Sankardev repeatedly referred to the fact that his village was close to the river: 'লৌহিত্যৰ আতী অনুকুল [close to the Lauhitya].'³² His odes to nature might have dodged references to the river,³³ but his legendary defiance of the might of the river always kept his followers spellbound.³⁴

Three centuries later, Maniram Dewan (1806–1858), a trusted ally of the East India Company government, who eventually had a falling out with it, did not even consider it important to acknowledge the river.³⁵ The first printed Assamese literary journal, *Orunodoi*, published by the American Baptist missionaries from 1846, which regularly published essays on European rivers, wonders of river engineering such as river bridges, or the tributaries of the Brahmaputra, amazingly, remained silent about the Brahmaputra.³⁶ Gunabhiram Barua (1834–1893), the liberal, humanist scholar, and bureaucrat, followed suit. Barua looked at the river as merely a fluvial force that dissected Assam geographically and sometimes aided in the movement of troops or high officials. His splendid introductory text on Assam's geography made cursory references to the river.³⁷ Yet, the river's tryst with the steam power also compelled writers such as Hem Chandra Goswami to script odes to the ships on the river,³⁸ but the river's centrality in Assam's layered histories was hardly recognized. Lakshminath Bezbarua, Assam's twentieth-century literary giant, was providentially born on the river, but it was both his steamer and railway trips between Assam and Bengal that became famous.³⁹

Modern readers got to know the river's central role in Assam's political history in Suryya Kumar Bhuyan's brilliant narratives of Ahom–Mughal warfare.⁴⁰ But that did not bring the river into the centre stage of the Assamese historical imagination. Bishnu Rabha (1909–1969), **(p.xxix)** communist political leader and cultural historian, was probably one of the first to give the river its due. That deep geological histories defined Assam's ancient past was recognized in his writings.⁴¹ He underscored that the Meghalaya hills are Assam's spine, that the monsoon sculpted Assam's landscape, and earthquakes regularly unfolded environmental dramas. Acknowledging its role as a 'geographical setting', Rabha also spoke of the many layers of cultural narratives of the Brahmaputra, how different tribes had their own claims on the river.⁴² Rabha's geological and political redesigning of the Brahmaputra also failed to put the river into the historians' orbit. The river continued to be more or less ignored in the ever-growing historical narratives on Assam including its environmental narratives.⁴³

As historians' wilful forgetting persisted, the world of high politics on land further shelved the river into a corner. With the coming of the railways and highways, the river was formally off stage.

Historians stitched together dry details of lands, unconnected histories of a varied landscape, and their craft drove the river into a corner. As the river was silently relegated away from the central position it held in Assam, its mega narratives came to be seen through the prism of two disconnected landscapes: highlands, or hills and plains.⁴⁴ If the story of the tea plantations came to be centred on the highlands, human dramas seemed to be unfolding in the plains. British historians were also fascinated by the hills/plains dichotomy.⁴⁵ These binaries, as key and distinct ecological features of Assam, helped the imperial government to expand and consolidate its economic interests and devise legal mechanisms to govern its new subjects. Assam's hill areas were administered in a different way, including the imperial government's promulgation of an administrative device known as the Inner Line Regulation of 1873.⁴⁶ Images of these binaries have entered deep into the current everyday narratives in Assam. Cultural, legal, and political vocabularies were devised to emphasize these binaries. This preoccupation with the ecological binaries of hills and plains or land and water has affected the way we have understood the river. A river of such monumental character has been made out to be a bystander of Assam's history. **(p.xxx)**

Historians' neglect, however, did not dislodge the Brahmaputra from its pre-eminent position in Assam's world of art, music, literature, and poetry. The river has been a source of inspiration for the Assamese imagination. Songs sung during Bihu—the springtime festival of the Assamese—lyrically describe the Luit's (the river's popular name) ecological features and its connections with everyday life.⁴⁷ In some of these Bihu songs, people appeal to the river and try to make a deal. 'The Barhamthuri on the bank of the Brahmaputra, the place where we gathered firewood, do not wash it away. O God Brahmaputra, you will lose those who offer you areca nut.' Illustrations of such folkloric songs are abundant; one of them thus appeals to the river. The magazine *Jonaki*, the torchbearer of Assamese literary modernity, published odes to the Brahmaputra. Melodious songs of Jyotiprasad Agarwalla, Bishnu Rabha, and Bhupen Hazarika immortalized the river as the source of Assam's idealism and also its dispossession. Hazarika's song 'Mohabahu Brahmaputra' (the mighty Brahmaputra) lauds the river as the home of great ideas and Assam's defence against its enemies. The river tells its own story in Ajit Barua's poetry: 'I am contemporary of all ... of all the three kinds of time.'⁴⁸ Barua's verses remind us of the innate life of the river and its formidable presence in the minds of Assam's residents.⁴⁹ In such works by singers, poets, and religious worshippers, the river becomes a tangible figure. These vivid portrayals of the river brought it alive in the minds of the people of the valley. In more recent times, in scores of writings on nature from India's northeast, those hilly, mountainous, swampy, and watery

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Exploring the Variety of Random Documents with Different Content

of the cheese and from which he filled, in his own manner, the little cup he carried in his pocket.

But at the sight of this the cockney's eyes lit at once with terror and desire.

"But yer cawnt do it," he whispered hoarsely, "its the pleece. It's gile for that, with no doctor's letter nor sign-board nor nothink."

Mr. Humphrey Pump made yet another march back into the road. When he got there he hesitated for the first time, but it was quite clear from the attitude of the two insane aristocrats who were arguing and posturing in the road that they would notice nothing except each other. He picked the loose post off the road and brought it to the car, humorously propping it erect in the aperture between keg and cheese.

The little glass of rum was wavering in the poor chauffeur's hand exactly as the big knife had done, but when he looked up and actually saw the wooden sign above him, he seemed not so much to pluck up his courage, but rather to drag up some forgotten courage from the foundations of some unfathomable sea. It was indeed the forgotten courage of the people.

He looked once at the bleak, black pinewoods around him and took the mouthful of golden liquid at a gulp, as if it were a fairy potion. He sat silent; and then, very slowly, a sort of stony glitter began to come into his eyes. The brown and vigilant eyes of Humphrey Pump were studying him with some anxiety or even fear. He did look rather like a man enchanted or turned to stone. But he spoke very suddenly.

"The blighter!" he said. "I'll give 'im 'ell. I'll give 'im bleeding 'ell. I'll give 'im somethink wot 'e don't expect."

"What do you mean?" asked the inn-keeper.

"Why," answered the chauffeur, with abrupt composure, "I'll give 'im a little dornkey."

Mr. Pump looked troubled. "Do you think," he observed, affecting to speak lightly, "that he's fit to be trusted even with a little donkey?"

"Ow, yes," said the man. "He's very amiable with donkeys, and donkeys we is to be amiable with 'im."

Pump still looked at him doubtfully, appearing or affecting not to follow his meaning. Then he looked equally anxiously across at the other two men; but they were still talking. Different as they were in every other way, they were of the sort who forget everything, class, quarrel, time, place and physical facts in front of them, in the lust of lucid explanation and equal argument.

Thus, when the Captain began by lightly alluding to the fact that after all it was his donkey, since he had bought it from a tinker for a just price, the police station practically vanished from Wimpole's mind—and I fear the donkey-cart also. Nothing remained but the necessity of dissipating the superstition of personal property.

"I own nothing," said the poet, waving his hands outward, "I own nothing save in the sense that I own everything. All depends whether wealth or power be used for or against the higher purposes of the cosmos."

"Indeed," replied Dalroy, "and how does your motor car serve the higher purposes of the cosmos?"

"It helps me," said Mr. Wimpole, with honourable simplicity, "to produce my poems."

"And if it could be used for some higher purpose (if such a thing could be), if some new purpose had come into the cosmos's head by accident," inquired the other, "I suppose it would cease to be your property."

"Certainly," replied the dignified Dorian. "I should not complain. Nor have you any title to complain when the donkey ceases to be yours when you depress it in the cosmic scale."

"What makes you think," asked Dalroy, "that I wanted to depress it?"

"It is my firm belief," replied Dorian Wimpole, sternly, "that you wanted to ride on it" (for indeed the Captain had once repeated his playful gesture of putting his large leg across). "Is not that so?"

"No," answered the Captain, innocently, "I never ride on a donkey. I'm afraid of it."

"Afraid of a donkey!" cried Wimpole, incredulously.

"Afraid of an historical comparison," said Dalroy.

There was a short pause, and Wimpole said coolly enough, "Oh, well, we've outlived those comparisons."

"Easily," answered the Irish Captain. "It is wonderful how easily one outlives someone else's crucifixion."

"In this case," said the other grimly, "I think it is the donkey's crucifixion."

"Why, you must have drawn that old Roman caricature of the crucified donkey," said Patrick Dalroy, with an air of some wonder. "How well you have worn; why, you look quite young! Well, of course, if this donkey is crucified, he must be uncrucified. But are you quite sure," he added, very gravely, "that you know how to uncrucify a donkey? I assure you it's one of the rarest of human arts. All a matter of knack. It's like the doctors with the rare diseases, you know; the necessity so seldom arises. Granted that, by the higher purposes of the cosmos, I am unfit to look after this donkey, I must still feel a faint shiver of responsibility in passing him on to you. Will you understand this donkey? He is a delicate-minded donkey. He is a complex donkey. How can I be certain that, on so short an acquaintance, you will understand every shade of his little likes and dislikes?"

The dog Quoodle, who had been sitting as still as the sphinx under the shadow of the pine trees, waddled out for an instant into the middle of the road and then returned. He ran out when a slight

noise as of rotatory grinding was heard; and ran back when it had ceased. But Dorian Wimpole was much too keen on his philosophical discovery to notice either dog or wheel.

"I shall not sit on its back, anyhow," he said proudly, "but if that were all it would be a small matter. It is enough for you that you have left it in the hands of the only person who could really understand it; one who searches the skies and seas so as not to neglect the smallest creature."

"This is a very curious creature," said the Captain, anxiously, "he has all sorts of odd antipathies. He can't stand a motor-car, for instance, especially one that throbs like that while it's standing still. He doesn't mind a fur coat so much, but if you wear a brown velvet jacket under it, he bites you. And you must keep him out of the way of a certain kind of people. I don't suppose you've met them; but they always think that anybody with less than two hundred a year is drunk and very cruel, and that anybody with more than two thousand a year is conducting the Day of Judgment. If you will keep our dear donkey from the society of such persons—Hullo! Hullo! Hullo!"

He turned in genuine disturbance, and dashed after the dog, who had dashed after the motor-car and jumped inside. The Captain jumped in after the dog, to pull him out again. But before he could do so, he found the car was flying along too fast for any such leap. He looked up and saw the sign of "The Old Ship" erect in the front like a rigid banner; and Pump, with his cask and cheese, sitting solidly beside the driver.

The thing was more of an earthquake and transformation to him even than to any of the others; but he rose waveringly to his feet and shouted out to Wimpole.

"You've left it in the right hands. I've never been cruel to a motor."

In the moonlight of the magic pine-wood far behind, Dorian and the donkey were left looking at each other.

To the mystical mind, when it is a mind at all (which is by no means always the case), there are no two things more impressive and symbolical than a poet and a donkey. And the donkey was a very genuine donkey, and the poet was a very genuine poet; however lawfully he might be mistaken for the other animal at times. The interest of the donkey in the poet will never be known. The interest of the poet in the donkey was perfectly genuine; and survived even that appalling private interview in the owlish secrecy of the woods.

But I think even the poet would have been enlightened if he had seen the white, set, frantic face of the man on the driver's seat of his vanishing motor. If he had seen it he might have remembered the name, or, perhaps, even begun to understand the nature of a certain animal which is neither the donkey nor the oyster; but the creature whom man has always found it easiest to forget, since the hour he forgot God in a Garden.

CHAPTER XV

THE SONGS OF THE CAR CLUB

MORE than once as the car flew through black and silver fairylands of fir wood and pine wood, Dalroy put his head out of the side window and remonstrated with the chauffeur without effect. He was reduced at last to asking him where he was going.

"I'm goin' 'ome," said the driver in an undecipherable voice. "I'm a goin' 'ome to my mar."

"And where does she live?" asked Dalroy, with something more like diffidence than he had ever shown before in his life.

"Wiles," said the man, "but I ain't seen 'er since I was born. But she'll do."

"You must realise," said Dalroy, with difficulty, "that you may be arrested—it's the man's own car; and he's left behind with nothing to eat, so to speak."

"E's got 'is dornkey," grunted the man. "Let the stinker eat 'is dornkey, with thistle sauce. 'E would if 'e was as 'ollow as I was."

Humphrey Pump opened the glass window that separated him from the rear part of the car, and turned to speak to his friend over his square elbow and shoulder.

"I'm afraid," he said, "he won't stop for anything just yet. He's as mad as Moody's aunt, as they say."

"Do they say it?" asked the Captain, with a sort of anxiety. "They never said it in Ithaca."

"Honestly, I think you'd better leave him alone," answered Pump, with his sagacious face. "He'd just run us into a Scotch Express like Dandy Mutton did, when they said he was driving carelessly. We can send the car back to Ivywood somehow later on, and really, I don't think it'll do the gentleman any harm to spend a night with a donkey. The donkey might teach him something, I tell you."

"It's true he denied the Principle of Private Property," said Dalroy, reflectively, "but I fancy he was thinking of a plain house fixed on the ground. A house on wheels, such as this, he might perhaps think a more permanent possession. But I never understand it;" and again he passed a weary palm across his open forehead. "Have you ever noticed, Hump, what is really odd about those people?"

The car shot on amid the comfortable silence of Pump, and then the Irishman said again:

"That poet in the pussy-cat clothes wasn't half bad. Lord Ivywood isn't cruel; but he's inhuman. But that man wasn't inhuman. He was ignorant, like most cultured fellows. But what's odd about them is that they try to be simple and never clear away a single thing that's complicated. If they have to choose between beef and pickles, they always abolish the beef. If they have to choose between a meadow and a motor, they forbid the meadow. Shall I tell you the secret? These men only surrender the things that bind them to other men. Go and dine with a temperance millionaire and you won't find he's abolished the *hors d'œuvres* or the five courses or even the coffee. What he's abolished is the port and sherry, because poor men like that as well as rich. Go a step farther, and you won't find he's abolished the fine silver forks and spoons, but he's abolished the meat, because poor men like meat—when they can get it. Go a step farther, and you won't find he goes without gardens or gorgeous rooms, which poor men can't enjoy at all. But you will find he boasts of early rising, because sleep is a thing poor men can still enjoy. About the only thing they can still enjoy. Nobody ever heard of a

modern philanthropist giving up petrol or typewriting or troops of servants. No, no! What he gives up must be some simple and universal thing. He will give up beef or beer or sleep—because these pleasures remind him that he is only a man.”

Humphrey Pump nodded, but still answered nothing; and the voice of the sprawling Dalroy took one of its upward turns of a sort of soaring flippancy; which commonly embodied itself in remembering some song he had composed.

“Such,” he said, “was the case of the late Mr. Mandragon, so long popular in English aristocratic society as a bluff and simple democrat from the West, until he was unfortunately sand-bagged by six men whose wives he had had shot by private detectives, on his incautiously landing on American soil.

"Mr. Mandragon the Millionaire, he wouldn't have wine or wife,
He couldn't endure complexity; he lived the simple life;
He ordered his lunch by megaphone in manly, simple tones,
And used all his motors for canvassing voters, and twenty telephones;
 Besides a dandy little machine,
 Cunning and neat as ever was seen,
 With a hundred pulleys and cranks between,
 Made of iron and kept quite clean,
To hoist him out of his healthful bed on every day of his life,
And wash him and brush him and shave him and dress him to live the Simple
 Life.

"Mr. Mandragon was most refined and quietly, neatly dressed,
Say all the American newspapers that know refinement best;
Quiet and neat the hair and hat, and the coat quiet and neat,
A trouser worn upon either leg, while boots adorned the feet;
 And not, as anyone might expect,
 A Tiger Skin, all striped and specked,
 And a Peacock Hat with the tail erect,
 A scarlet tunic with sunflowers decked—
That might have had a more marked effect,
And pleased the pride of a weaker man that yearned for wine or wife;
But fame and the flagon for Mr. Mandragon obscured the Simple Life.

"Mr. Mandragon the Millionaire, I am happy to say, is dead.
He enjoyed a quiet funeral in a crematorium shed,
And he lies there fluffy and soft and grey and certainly quite refined,
When he might have rotted to flowers and fruit with Adam and all mankind.
 Or been eaten by bears that fancy blood,
 Or burnt on a big tall tower of wood,
 In a towering flame as a heathen should,
 Or even sat with us here at food,
Merrily taking twopenny rum and cheese with a pocket knife,
But these were luxuries lost for him that lived for the Simple Life."

Mr. Pump had made many attempts to arrest this song, but they were as vain as all attempts to arrest the car. The angry chauffeur seemed, indeed, rather inspired to further energy by the violent vocal noises behind; and Pump again found it best to fall back on conversation.

"Well, Captain," he said, amicably. "I can't quite agree with you about those things. Of course, you can trust foreigners too much as poor Thompson did; but then you can go too far the other way. Aunt Sarah lost a thousand pounds that way. I told her again and again he wasn't a nigger, but she wouldn't believe me. And, of course, that was just the kind of thing to offend an ambassador if he was an Austrian. It seems to me, Captain, you aren't quite fair to these foreign chaps. Take these Americans, now! There were many Americans went by Pebblewick, you may suppose. But in all the lot there was never a bad lot; never a nasty American, nor a stupid American—nor, well, never an American that I didn't rather like."

"I know," said Dalroy, "you mean there was never an American who did not appreciate 'The Old Ship.'"

"I suppose I do mean that," answered the inn-keeper, "and somehow, I feel 'The Old Ship' might appreciate the American too."

"You English are an extraordinary lot," said the Irishman, with a sudden and sombre quietude. "I sometimes feel you may pull through after all."

After another silence he said, "You're always right, Hump, and one oughtn't to think of Yankees like that. The rich are the scum of the earth in every country. And a vast proportion of the real Americans are among the most courteous, intelligent, self-respecting people in the world. Some attribute this to the fact that a vast proportion of the real Americans are Irishmen."

Pump was still silent, and the Captain resumed in a moment.

"All the same," he said, "it's very hard for a man, especially a man of a small country like me, to understand how it must feel to be an American; especially in the matter of nationality. I shouldn't like to have to write the American National Anthem, but fortunately there is no great probability of the commission being given. The shameful secret of my inability to write an American patriotic song is one that will die with me."

"Well, what about an English one," said Pump, sturdily. "You might do worse, Captain."

"English, you bloody tyrant," said Patrick, indignantly. "I could no more fancy a song by an Englishman than you could one by that dog."

Mr. Humphrey Pump gravely took the paper from his pocket, on which he had previously inscribed the sin and desolation of grocers, and felt in another of his innumerable pockets for a pencil.

"Hullo," cried Dalroy. "Are you going to have a shy at the Ballad of Quoodle?"

Quoodle lifted his ears at his name. Mr. Pump smiled a slight and embarrassed smile. He was secretly proud of Dalroy's admiration for his previous literary attempts and he had some natural knack for verse as a game, as he had for all games; and his reading, though desultory, had not been merely rustic or low.

"On condition," he said, deprecatingly, "that you write a song for the English."

"Oh, very well," said Patrick, with a huge sigh that really indicated the very opposite of reluctance. "We must do something till the thing stops, I suppose, and this seems a blameless parlour game. 'Songs of the Car Club.' Sounds quite aristocratic."

And he began to make marks with a pencil on the fly-leaf of a little book he had in his pocket—Wilson's *Noctes Ambrosianæ*. Every now and then, however, he looked up and delayed his own composition by watching Pump and the dog, whose proceedings amused him very much. For the owner of "The Old Ship" sat sucking his pencil and looking at Mr. Quoodle with eyes of fathomless attention. Every now and then he slightly scratched his brown hair with the pencil, and wrote down a word. And the dog Quoodle, with that curious canine power of either understanding or most brazenly pretending to understand what is going on, sat erect with his head at an angle, as if he were sitting for his portrait.

Hence it happened that though Pump's poem was a little long, as are often the poems of inexperienced poets, and though Dalroy's poem was very short (being much hurried toward the end) the long poem was finished some time before the short one.

Therefore it was that there was first produced for the world the song more familiarly known as "No Noses," or more correctly called "The Song of Quoodle." Part of it ran eventually thus:—

"They haven't got no noses
The fallen sons of Eve,
Even the smell of roses
Is not what they supposes,
But more than mind discloses,
And more than men believe.

"They haven't got no noses,
They cannot even tell
When door and darkness closes
The park a Jew encloses,
Where even the Law of Moses
Will let you steal a smell;

"The brilliant smell of water,
The brave smell of a stone,
The smell of dew and thunder
And old bones buried under,
Are things in which they blunder
And err, if left alone.

"The wind from winter forests,
The scent of scentless flowers,
The breath of bride's adorning,
The smell of snare and warning,
The smell of Sunday morning,
God gave to us for ours.

“And Quoodle here discloses
All things that Quoodle can;
They haven’t got no noses,
They haven’t got no noses,
And goodness only knowses
The Noselessness of Man.”

This poem also shows traces of haste in its termination, and the present editor (who has no aim save truth) is bound to confess that parts of it were supplied in the criticisms of the Captain, and even enriched (in later and livelier circumstances) by the Poet of the Birds himself. At the actual moment the chief features of this realistic song about dogs was a crashing chorus of “Bow-wow, wow,” begun by Mr. Patrick Dalroy; but immediately imitated (much more successfully) by Mr. Quoodle. In the face of all this Dalroy suffered some real difficulty in fulfilling the bargain by reading out his much shorter poem about what he imagined an Englishman might feel. Indeed there was something very rough and vague in his very voice as he read it out; as of one who had not found the key to his problem. The present compiler (who has no aim save truth) must confess that the verses ran as follows:—

"St. George he was for England,
And before he killed the dragon
He drank a pint of English ale
Out of an English flagon.
For though he fast right readily
In hair-shirt or in mail,
It isn't safe to give him cakes
Unless you give him ale.

St. George he was for England,
And right gallantly set free
The lady left for dragon's meat
And tied up to a tree;
But since he stood for England
And knew what England means,
Unless you give him bacon,
You mustn't give him beans.

"St. George he was for England,
And shall wear the shield he wore
When we go out in armour,
With the battle-cross before;
But though he is jolly company
And very pleased to dine,
It isn't safe to give him nuts
Unless you give him wine."

"Very philosophical song that," said Dalroy, shaking his head solemnly, "full of deep thought. I really think that is about the truth of the matter, in the case of the Englishman. Your enemies say you're stupid, and you boast of being illogical—which is about the only thing you do that really *is* stupid. As if anybody ever made an Empire or anything else by saying that two and two make five. Or as if anyone was ever the stronger for *not* understanding anything—if it were only tip-cat or chemistry. But this *is* true about you Hump. You English are supremely an artistic people, and therefore you go by associations, as I said in my song. You won't have one thing without the other thing that goes with it. And as you can't imagine a village without a squire and parson, or a college without port and old oak, you get the reputation of a Conservative people. But it's because

you're sensitive, Hump, not because you're stupid, that you won't part with things. It's lies, lies and flattery they tell you, Hump, when they tell you you're fond of compromise. I tell ye, Hump, every real revolution is a compromise. D'ye think Wolfe Tone or Charles Stuart Parnell never compromised? But it's just because you're afraid of a compromise that you won't have a revolution. If you really overhauled 'The Old Ship'—or Oxford—you'd have to make up your mind what to take and what to leave, and it would break your heart, Humphrey Pump."

He stared in front of him with a red and ruminant face, and at length added, somewhat more gloomily.

"This æsthetic way we have, Hump, has only two little disadvantages which I will now explain to you. The first is exactly what has sent us flying in this contraption. When the beautiful, smooth, harmonious thing you've made is worked by a new type, in a new spirit, then I tell you it would be better for you a thousand times to be living under the thousand paper constitutions of Condorcet and Sieyès. When the English oligarchy is run by an Englishman who hasn't got an English mind—then you have Lord Ivywood and all this nightmare, of which God could only guess the end."

The car had beaten some roods of dust behind it, and he ended still more darkly:

"And the other disadvantage, my amiable æsthete, is this. If ever, in blundering about the planet, you come on an island in the Atlantic—Atlantis, let us say—which won't accept *all* your pretty picture—to which you can't give everything—*why* you will probably decide to give nothing. You will say in your hearts: 'Perhaps they will starve soon'; and you will become, for that island, the deafest and the most evil of all the princes of the earth."

It was already daybreak, and Pump, who knew the English boundaries almost by intuition, could tell even through the twilight that the tail of the little town they were leaving behind was of a new

sort, the sort to be seen in the western border. The chauffeur's phrase about his mother might merely have been a music-hall joke; but certainly he had driven darkly in that direction.

White morning lay about the grey stoney streets like spilt milk. A few proletarian early risers, wearier at morning than most men at night, seemed merely of opinion that it was no use crying over it. The two or three last houses, which looked almost too tired to stand upright, seemed to have moved the Captain into another sleepy explosion.

"There are two kinds of idealists, as everybody knows—or must have thought of. There are those who idealize the real and those who (precious seldom) realize the ideal. Artistic and poetical people like the English generally idealize the real. This I have expressed in a song, which—"

"No, really," protested the innkeeper, "really now, Captain—"

"This I have expressed in a song," repeated Dalroy, in an adamant manner, "which I will now sing with every circumstance of leisure, loudness, or any other—"

He stopped because the flying universe seemed to stop. Charging hedgerows came to a halt, as if challenged by the bugle. The racing forests stood rigid. The last few tottering houses stood suddenly at attention. For a noise like a pistol-shot from the car itself had stopped all that race, as a pistol-shot might start any other.

The driver clambered out very slowly, and stood about in various tragic attitudes round the car. He opened an unsuspected number of doors and windows in the car, and touched things and twisted things and felt things.

"I must back as best I can to that there garrige, sir," he said, in a heavy and husky tone they had not heard from him before.

Then he looked round on the long woods and the last houses, and seemed to gnaw his lip, like a great general who has made a great mistake. His brow seemed as black as ever, yet his voice, when he

spoke again, had fallen many further degrees toward its dull and daily tone.

"Yer see, this is a bit bad," he said. "It'll be a beastly job even at the best plices, if I'm gettin' back at all."

"Getting back," repeated Dalroy, opening the blue eyes of a bull. "Back where?"

"Well, yer see," said the chauffeur, reasonably, "I was bloody keen to show 'im it was me drove the car and not 'im. By a bit o' bad luck, I done damage to 'is car. Well—if *you* can stick in 'is car—"

Captain Patrick Dalroy sprang out of the car so rapidly that he almost reeled and slipped upon the road. The dog sprang after him, barking furiously.

"Hump," said Patrick, quietly. "I've found out everything about you. I know what always bothered me about the Englishman."

Then, after an instant's silence, he said, "That Frenchman was right who said (I forget how he put it) that you march to Trafalgar Square to rid yourself of your temper; not to rid yourself of your tyrant. Our friend was quite ready to rebel, rushing away. To rebel sitting still was too much for him. Do you read *Punch*? I am sure you do. Pump and *Punch* must be almost the only survivors of the Victorian Age. Do you remember an old joke in an excellent picture, representing two ragged Irishmen with guns, waiting behind a stone wall to shoot a landlord? One of the Irishmen says the landlord is late, and adds, 'I hope no accident's happened to the poor gintleman.' Well, it's all perfectly true; I knew that Irishman intimately, but I want to tell you a secret about him. He was an Englishman."

The chauffeur had backed with breathless care to the entrance of the garage, which was next door to a milkman's or merely separated from it by a black and lean lane, looking no larger than the crack of a door. It must, however, have been larger than it looked, because Captain Dalroy disappeared down it.

He seemed to have beckoned the driver after him; at any rate that functionary instantly followed. The functionary came out again in an almost guilty haste, touching his cap and stuffing loose papers into his pocket. Then the functionary returned yet again from what he called the "garrige," carrying larger and looser things over his arm.

All this did Mr. Humphrey Pump observe, not without interest. The place, remote as it was, was evidently a *rendez-vous* for motorists. Otherwise a very tall motorist, throttled and masked in the most impenetrable degree, would hardly have strolled up to speak to him. Still less would the tall motorist have handed him a similar horrid disguise of wraps and goggles, in a bundle over his arm. Least of all would any motorist, however tall, have said to him from behind the cap and goggles, "Put on these things, Hump, and then we'll go into the milk shop. I'm waiting for the car. Which car, my seeker after truth? Why the car I'm going to buy for you to drive."

The remorseful chauffeur, after many adventures, did actually find his way back to the little moonlit wood where he had left his master and the donkey. But his master and the donkey had vanished.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SEVEN MOODS OF DORIAN

THAT timeless clock of all lunatics, which was so bright in the sky that night, may really have had some elfin luck about it, like a silver penny. Not only had it initiated Mr. Hibbs into the mysteries of Dionysius, and Mr. Bullrose into the arboreal habits of his ancestors, but one night of it made a very considerable and rather valuable change in Mr. Dorian Wimpole, the Poet of the Birds. He was a man neither foolish nor evil, any more than Shelley; only a man made sterile by living in a world of indirectness and insincerity, with words rather than with things. He had not had the smallest intention of starving his chauffeur; he did not realize that there was worse spiritual murder in merely forgetting him. But as hour after hour passed over him, alone with the donkey and the moon, he went through a raging and shifting series of frames of mind, such as his cultured friends would have described as moods.

The First Mood, I regret to say, was one of black and grinding hatred. He had no notion of the chauffeur's grievance, and could only suppose he had been bribed or intimidated by the demonic donkey-torturers. But Mr. Wimpole was much more capable at that moment of torturing a chauffeur than Mr. Pump had ever been of torturing a donkey; for no sane man can hate an animal. He kicked the stones in the road, sending them flying into the forest, and wished that each one of them was a chauffeur. The bracken by the roadside he tore up by the roots, as representing the hair of the chauffeur, to which it bore no resemblance. He hit with his fist such

trees, as, I suppose, seemed in form and expression most reminiscent of the chauffeur; but desisted from this, finding that in this apparently one-sided contest the tree had rather the best of it. But the whole wood and the whole world had become a kind of omnipresent and pantheistic chauffeur, and he hit at him everywhere.

The thoughtful reader will realise that Mr. Wimpole had already taken a considerable upward stride in what he would have called the cosmic scale. The next best thing to really loving a fellow creature is really hating him: especially when he is a poorer man separated from you otherwise by mere social stiffness. The desire to murder him is at least an acknowledgment that he is alive. Many a man has owed the first white gleams of the dawn of Democracy in his soul to a desire to find a stick and beat the butler. And we have it on the unimpeachable local authority of Mr. Humphrey Pump that Squire Merriman chased his librarian through three villages with a horse-pistol; and was a Radical ever after.

His rage also did him good merely as a relief, and he soon passed into a second and more positive mood of meditation.

"The damnable monkeys go on like this," he muttered, "and then they call a donkey one of the Lower Animals. Ride on a donkey would he? I'd like to see the donkey riding on him for a bit. Good old man."

The patient ass turned mild eyes on him when he patted it, and Dorian Wimpole discovered, with a sort of subconscious surprise, that he really was fond of the donkey. Deeper still in his subliminal self he knew that he had never been fond of an animal before. His poems about fantastic creatures had been quite sincere, and quite cold. When he said he loved a shark, he meant he saw no reason for hating a shark, which was right enough. There is no reason for hating a shark, however much reason there may be for avoiding one. There is no harm in a craken if you keep it in a tank—or in a sonnet.

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